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Faculty of tourism and business logistics -
Gevgelia**

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CHALLENGES OF TOURISM AND BUSINESS LOGISTICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY



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PREFACE

The Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics in Gevgelija, at the Goce Delcev University - Stip, hosted the First International Scientific Conference, "Challenges of Tourism and Business Logistics in the 21st Century".

The conference was held on 24 and 25 October 2017 in Gevgelija with an optional visit to Dojran - Dojran Lake.

32 works of 60 authors from Serbia, Latvia, Turkey, Poland, Bulgaria, Kosovo and Macedonia were presented at the Conference.

The purpose of the Conference is exchange of ideas and experiences of the participants coming from Macedonia and abroad, and establishment of cooperation for further development of tourism and business logistics in Macedonia and beyond.

The results of the Conference are visible through publication in a collection of papers, which is presented to a wider scientific audience and the public.

In this way, we want to promote the Faculty of Tourism and Business Logistics, to promote Gevgelija and Dojran as the most visited settlements in the south-eastern part of Macedonia.

Gevgelija - Stip,
December 2017

Editor
Nikola V. Dimitrov Ph.D. *Dean*

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SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ISSUES – THE ROLE OF LOCAL COMMUNITY (CASE OF SERBIA)

Aleksandra Terzić¹; Nataša Simeunović Bajić²

Abstract

More than any other economic activity, tourism is considered to be the most “sustainable” and “green” activity, with the easiest ways to achieve the overall sustainable goals. The sustainable tourism development has always been a paradigm and a strategic goal of almost every official document in connection to regional, economic, socio-cultural development of every nation. Even though the “sustainable tourism” label has been applied in full extent in different documents, plans and promotional activities, it can hardly be said that the real principles of sustainable development (economic, social or environmental) have been applied in practice. There are different challenges in addressing the sustainability aspects, but the role of the local communities has always been marginalized when it comes to the tourism development. It is especially important aspect, as sustainable tourism should be planned in a way to benefit local residents, respect local cultures and conserve heritage resources.

Key Words: *sustainable, tourism, local community, Serbia*

JEL classification: L88, L83, M14

Introduction

In the contemporary world, the aspect of sustainability has become a key variable in the competitiveness of tourist destinations (World Economic Forum, 2013) and therefore a primary objective for public authorities and national governments. However, making tourism sustainable is not easy, mainly because the imprecise nature of the concept of sustainability makes it difficult to apply in practice (Terzić, 2017).

Ever since the concept of sustainability appeared in strategic documents such as “Our Common Future” (WECD, 1987) it was considered and argued as a kind of idealistic philosophy with no realistic means of application in practice. However, more recently the concept of Sustainable Development model is finally clearly

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designed and affirms the strict scientific approach in relation to four paradigms: direct relation to the environment, multi-criterial approach, the inter and intra-generational approach, the measurability (Pearce et al., 1996; Sachs, 2015). Thanks to the role played by the UN we passed from the vision of Our Common Future to the Future we want (UN Rio+20, 2012) and Transforming our World (UNGAS, 2015). Consequently, the concept of Sustainability is acceptable for all, on global level, as it also changed the level of consciousness of both the policymakers and civil societies. The newly established Sustainable Development Goals with defined targets for 2030 are a big challenge to be achieved. Moreover, it promotes the sort of economic democracy where the local communities become direct actors and creators of their own destiny.

Sustainable tourism is a tourist activity which centers on resource management in such a way that all economic, social and aesthetic needs of tourists are met, while abiding by cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and the life-support system (UNWTO, 1993). As the fast-growing tourism development has recently made sustainability a major concern, pointing to the need to balance aspects of resource conservation, tourism development and local community well-being. Numerous policies and agendas make links between environment, culture, tourism and socio-economic issues of poverty and degradation (UNESCO 1995, United Nations 2015). It is largely recognized that, to achieve its strategic aims of economic development, ecological safeguarding and social inclusion, sustainable tourism development requires some degree of integration within overall development strategies at both national and international/transnational levels. Even though, the Berlin Declaration (1997) made a strong normative point by suggesting that “tourism should be developed in a way so that it benefits the local communities, strengthens the local economy, employs the local workforce, and wherever ecologically sustainable, uses local materials, local agricultural products and traditional skills”, it still hasn't been applied in practice.

The role of local communities

Considering the development of sustainable tourism destinations, the social aspect is one of the three main pillars on which development depends on. By addressing the general question on who is responsible for the sustainability of the destinations on national and local levels, it must be said that strict definitions cannot be applied. There are different responsibilities of various actors, but all parties share their interest in developing a sustainable tourism destination. In practice, the biggest challenge in the development and management of tourist destinations shows to be the harmonization of the interests and organization and networking of numerous actors (stakeholders) (Terzić, 2016). Often, the local (municipal) governments and local tourism organizations, are defined as DMO's (destination management organizations), and thereby are responsible for creating tourism policies and planning, but even more responsibilities lie in the community actions as they are direct actors, producers and beneficiaries of tourism at destination level.

The existing literature suggests that residents should be the major actors in the tourism development process since they are directly affected by it (Ap, 1992; Gunn, 1994; Choi and Sirakaya, 2005; Kyungmi, et al., 2013). Sustainable tourism as an emerging paradigm seems to enhance the existing conceptual frameworks on tourism planning and development by making the residents its focal point. Local governments, developers and community residents have been known to overlook or dismiss the importance of the surrounding environment and aspire only to maximize economic growth. However, the sustainable tourism promotes the needs to protect local and national culture, improve social and individual well-being, and conserve/preserve the surrounding environment (Terzić et al., 2014).

The sustainability of destination must rely on the social factors at its base. If the community shows no respect to the environmental issues nor has the proper share in the economic gain from the tourism sector, there will be small chances that the destination can be regarded sustainable. The well-being of the local community is key factor in the development of sustainability. It ensures the stability of the urban/rural setting and the basic functionality of destination. The quality of life and economic strength of the community are also factors that define the quality of a destination and limits the negative migration flows at a destination.

In order to fulfill the demand for reaching sustainability from community oriented perspective, it is suggested that the special mechanisms, including policies and legislation, should be introduced to ensure the flow of benefits directly to local communities (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005; Terzić et al., 2015). Different studies suggest that it is not only important to involve the community in the development process in order to gain the support for tourism industry, but its sustainability and the overall well-being of the community also remain a goal (Terzić, 2017).

The role of the local community is especially important in the development of the sustainable tourism that ‘is deliberately planned from the beginning to benefit local residents, respect local culture, conserve natural resources, and educate both tourists and local residents’ (Steck, 1999, p. 4). This role needs to be in comply with the triple bottom line approach; this means that all activities and practice of the sustainable tourism are directly connected to all three aspects of organizing a local community environmentally, socially (culturally), and economically. The ideal development of sustainable tourism could not harm the local community in any of these aspects (Bien, 2006; Terzić, 2017). Since tourism services mostly depend on local institutions and participation of local citizens, ‘support and pride in tourism development are especially important in the case of cultural tourism where the community is part of a product’ (Cole, 2008, p. 58).

How to measure the sustainability

After the global promotion of the concept of sustainability and “sustainable tourist destinations”, it became clear that it was not enough just to define what is considered “sustainable”, nor declaring something to be “sustainable” in strategic documents and plans. There was the obvious need to define specific indicators and measures which will quantitatively and qualitatively present the level of achieved

sustainability. Indicators play a key role as the main quantitative instruments used to parameterize activities and their sustainability. The vital contribution indicators make to the decision-making processes related to planning and public management derives from their ability to describe and measure the reality of a specific area in terms of objective parameters, thus facilitating understanding of a particular territory and the elements and processes that take place at destination level.

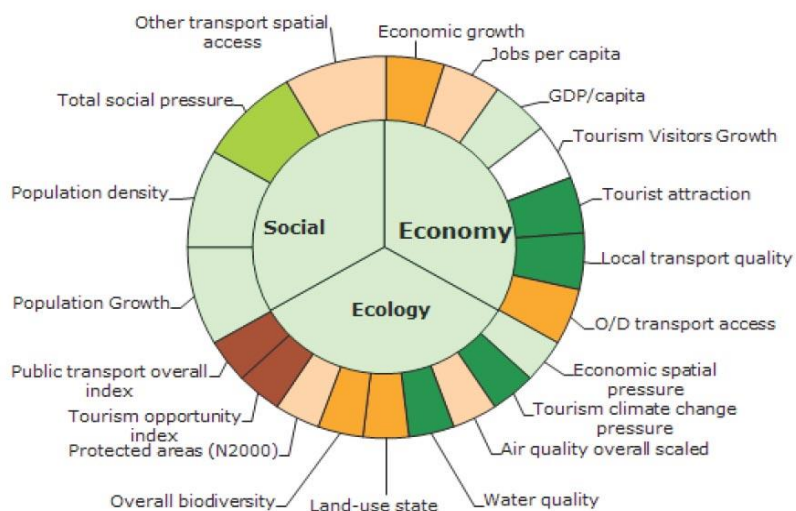


Figure 1. Sustainable Development Indicators,

Source:

The concept of sustainable tourism is composed of three dimensions: social, economic and environmental, and involves a consideration of each of the components through: Visitors – their needs, aspirations and wellbeing; Industry – the need for tourism businesses to be profitable and have a long-term future; Community - respecting the values, needs and quality of life of the local community; Environment - conserving the cultural and physical environments, local identity and sense of place.

Without the qualitative and quantitative measurements of the effects of tourism, it is difficult to make confident conclusions whether tourism is based on a sustainable basis or whether valid management decisions are made. Besides, the WTO, the European Union, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development and other relevant institutions, numerous teams of experts have been working hard in the last two decades, in order to analyze completely the issue of sustainable tourism indicators (Jovičić, 2014). Given the complex nature of tourism systems, there are an infinite number of tourism-related indicators to choose from. The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) created specific criteria in an effort to reach a mutual understanding of sustainable destinations. It defined the minimum undertakings that any tourism management organization should aspire to when considering sustainability in their practices. In order to integrate these needs into an operational framework the Special guidelines were established by the United Nations

World Tourism Organization in 2004. The WTO provided an indicative list of issues on which action is needed to achieve the goal of sustainable tourism, identifying those considered as basic for their importance in assessing the sustainability of the tourist activity. Moreover, it considers that the concept of sustainable tourism is composed of three main dimensions: social, economic and environmental, following previous studies on the subject (Mauerhofer, 2008; Tanguay et al., 2010).

In the previous attempts to apply the concept of sustainable tourism in practice, more emphasis was placed on the consideration of the economic effects of tourism and its impacts on the natural environment, while the socio-cultural impacts on the local community were not in the primary focus. This situation does not correspond with the original definition of sustainable development which points that sustainable development should respect the subjective needs of the local communities. Accordingly, the future conceptualization of sustainable tourism issues must involve the local communities as much as they would involve the issues of the environment and economy (Jovičić, 2014).

Quantitative social indicators for the development of the sustainable tourism destinations include: socio-cultural effects of tourism on host community (capacity of health services, capacity of transport services), safety at the destination (level of crime, investment in local public safety, provision of local public safety services), conservation of cultural heritage (designations which are recognized as structures, monuments and historical sites, efforts of the institutions in increasing the protection of heritage), effects on national population structure (increase of the young population, ageing of the population, population density, sustaining population levels), social carrying capacity of the destination (imposition of foreign culture and the pressure on host culture, social carrying capacity), effects on the level of well-being of the local population (effects on the living conditions, on the reduction of social marginalization, unequal distribution of income among locals, educational levels of the resident population, levels of dependency of the resident community, access to housing, integration and reduction of gender inequalities, percentage of people employed in tourism sector), etc. (UNWTO, 2005).

However, since we want to focus on the social dimension, as the first and basic indicator for the sustainability at the destination level, the sustainability aspects concerning the local community in particular, also include some qualitative aspects, considering the following: decent livelihood opportunities; numbers of tourism businesses owned and operated by the locals; local communities' share of profits from tourism; training of locals to acquire competence and skill for participating in heritage conservation and heritage tourism; respect for local intellectual property; locals' accessibility to heritage as tourism resource and use of tourism facilities; local community participation in decision making relating to tourism development of heritage resource (involvement in the planning, research and decision-making process, community satisfaction with tourism practice and heritage conservation, etc.) (Xiang and Wall, 2005).

As sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and sociocultural aspects of tourism development, it is very difficult to address these issues and evaluate the levels of sustainability. In the lack of quantitative or even more qualitative data related to the defined indicators of sustainability, which is an

obvious challenge, especially in underdeveloped countries, there is also obvious confusion on how to precisely define graduation marks pointing to the “sustainable level”. This issue is not connected exclusively to the qualitative data, but also to some measurable quantitative indicators. The living standard and the social well-being indicate also the possibility to participate and really engage and address the environmental, cultural and social issues at communal/regional/national level.

Measuring the sustainability of tourism destinations – Evidence from Serbia

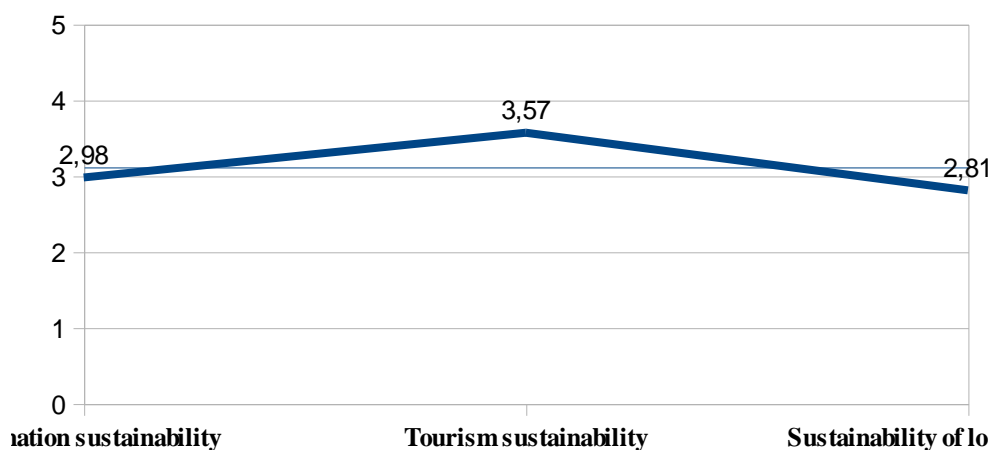
The inter-relationships between environment, culture, tourism and development are universal, affecting both developed and developing nations. However, how these issues are dealt with in policy in management terms varies considerably. Since the 1960s era of mass tourism, discourses on tourism development have oscillated between two broadly interpreted models of top-down development characterized by infrastructural provision and inward investment, and bottom-up approaches favoring facilitated and integrated local development strategies. Top-bottom model is often criticized for its spatial and social degradation, its short-term approach and its economic disarticulation with the local economy, relying on the idea of benefits somehow trickling down through communities. The lack of community participation/ decision-making and engagement is earmarked as a feature of such models, especially in underdeveloped countries.

The issue of sustainability of Serbian tourist destinations was the main objective of National Tourism Strategies and Action Plans ever since the adaptation of the Agenda 21 (UNWTO, 1994), following the recommendations coming from the neighbors and following the path towards EU. However, the strategic goals never addressed nor evaluated the current state of destinations, but rather promoted new destinations, hotels, tourist attractions, with no realistic nor sustainable means of accomplishing often extremely ambitious goals. The idea of the research was to try to evaluate to some extent the sustainability of Serbian destination following the indicators defined by different scientific studies. To do this, by applying defined criteria, a questionnaire was created, containing the initial list of 30 key indicators that were considered optimal and sufficient for assessing tourism sustainability in Serbian municipalities, along with some descriptive statistics of respondents. The survey included evaluation of three levels of sustainability: sustainable destination strategy including heritage resource conservation, sustainability of tourism regarding quality of visitors’ experience; and sustainability of the local community (tourism-related). As there was an issue of how to do the statistically measurable results, the Linkert Scale was applied (1-5).

There was also an issue of who it should be submitted to and how to reach the respondents that know about the sustainability aspects on all three levels and who will be able to understand and properly answer the questions. It was decided that the survey should be addressed to the local DMOs, whose employees come from the local area, are devoted to the tourism management and promotion of local resources and have the proper knowledge on the state of the tourist resources and existing problems, as well as of the local participation levels in terms of tourism engagement. Another

issue appeared, that of being extremely time consuming and expensive to visit all tourist destinations and interview the DMO representatives at the destination itself. The possibility to submit the survey via e-mail was expected not to be the right solution, because people in Serbia are not used nor willing to fill-in the surveys. The solution was found in the organization of the International Tourism Fair in Belgrade, where all local tourist organizations meet once a year in order to promote Serbian tourist destinations. The semi-structured interview and the survey was conducted during the 36th and 37th International Tourism Fair in Belgrade (27.03 - 02.03. 2014 and 19.02 – 22.02.2015) and during the Tourism Fair in Novi Sad (08 – 10.10.2015). Using the specialized questionnaires, a total of 119 respondents were interviewed. Considering that in Serbia currently there are 169 local tourist organizations, 67% of the total number of total DMO's was included in the study.

Figure 1: Level of achieved sustainability of tourist destinations in Serbia



Source: Survey results, authors calculation

The results of the survey indicated that the sustainability levels are on a medium level of achievement, pointing to the fact that the tourism economy is considered most sustainable at destination level with average mark 3,57, while the sustainability and well-being of the local communities got the worst results with average 2,81. Considering the result in direct connection to the social aspect of the sustainability and the role of local community in the tourism development process in Serbia, the results were relatively low. Taking in consideration that the study focused on DMO representatives, the results are a little exaggerated, and more realistic results would come from a survey among the local community members. However, the extent of the study to achieve a representative sample and reliability of the answers gained from such a sample could be regarded as non-reliable as well. In fact, it is obvious that the direct involvement of the local community in tourism development in Serbia is lacking.

Conclusions

In line with the sustainable development agenda, the issues outlined are critical in the context of developing countries, as tourism has been prioritized as an important driving force for economic development in many countries. Once a community becomes a tourist destination, the lives of residents become affected by tourism activities. In most cases communities desire the maintenance or improvement of the quality of life with added benefits from tourism. Improving the quality of life of local communities, increases also the possibilities to develop sustainable tourism destination, where the quality of public and tourism related services, improvement of the state of natural and cultural resources, used by both, locals and tourists, and the overall life-satisfaction and participation of locals in the development process contributes to the greater appeal and positive image of a destination. As in most communities, local officials and developers make the key decisions about tourism development projects, overall, the community's input should be at least reactive. The government has a key role on upgrading the attractiveness and quality of tourist destinations. It is responsible for functional infrastructure, spatial and urban development, protection and management of natural/cultural heritage sites, but also has the responsibility to involve the local community in the process. Public meetings afford the opportunity for local communities to comment on the plans being proposed, and to make sure their residents have a chance to weigh in on matters. However, it is still rare that community members are invited to participate in the entire process from beginning to end. The means and measures to control, evaluate and constantly review the tourism development process to achieve the sustainability goals must be provided by public authorities. Sustainable development of destination can only be achieved by making best use of the regional and local development potential, focusing on the urban growth poles. This can be done through leveling demographic and economic disparities, creation of adequate economic capacities, housing, health care, recreation, service facilities and cultural life, enhancing the life conditions of residents and creating more appealing tourist destinations. Thus, the interests of the community must be placed at the very center of sustainable tourism development process.

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